

Talking Points

West Alabama – East Mississippi WIRED Initiative Announcement

Meridian

Monday, October 15, 2007

LOCATION: Loblolly Inc. equipment testing center. Loblolly is a locally-owned, \$140 million new technology wood products company making engineered beams from juvenile pine trees.

SIGNIFICANCE TO EVENT:

1. Loblolly will use a high-tech, totally automated manufacturing process that will require workers with advanced manufacturing skills.
2. Loblolly will draw these workers from both West Alabama and East Mississippi.
3. Loblolly will draw its raw materials from the same region.
4. Building on the region's assets to create high-skill, high paying jobs is a top goal of the WIRED Initiative.

The PUL Alliance in North Mississippi and its success in landing Toyota is just the latest example of why “regions” are becoming the players in economic development. WIRED stands Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development.

Gov. Bob Riley and I jointly sought this WIRED grant to help make this area of West Alabama and East Mississippi a globally competitive region.

How? By creating an innovative, regional workforce education and training system to address key skill needs in the region. A competent workforce is the key to global competitiveness.

Today, I'm happy to announce two big steps toward accomplishing that goal. They come in two areas I promote every day – better workforce training systems and lifelong learning:

1. The West Alabama-East Mississippi Alliance

The region's eight community and junior colleges ...

- Alabama Southern, Beville State, Shelton State, and Wallace – Selma in Alabama; and
- East Central, East Mississippi, Jones County, and Meridian in Mississippi

... today officially join together to form the WAEM Alliance.

Intended to last far beyond the WIRED Initiative, this Alliance will provide the platform for these colleges to:

- Support regional economic development projects – across the state line and throughout the region,
 - Establish and award a regional credential for advanced manufacturing and other high-tech industries,
 - Align credit and non-credit career and technical training programs to regional priorities – such as those highlighted at Gov. Riley’s and my WAEM Summit in May, and
 - Jointly acquire and implement innovative training systems ... and that leads to my second announcement.
2. The WAEM Alliance has purchased and is the process of implementing an industry-proven, region-wide, virtual advanced manufacturing training system.

This anytime-anywhere Internet based, on-line system, will support:

- technical training at colleges and allied high schools;
- on-site training for business and industry; and

- individual skills training at home, at work, or anywhere there is broadband Internet access.

In a few minutes, Chris Crawford, the Amatrol representative in Mississippi, will demonstrate this system.

This regional training system will be supported by \$4 million in WIRED investments to stand-up and upgrade advanced manufacturing training at the eight colleges.

Soon, this region will have one of the most innovative, accessible, advanced manufacturing training systems in the United States. I particularly like the lifelong learning part of this where anyone can gain access to improve his or her technical skills.

Gov. Riley and I have partnered successfully to improve livelihoods in both our states. He could not be here with us today, but I'm pleased to welcome on his behalf Bill Johnson, executive director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs.